



Key messages are provided to ensure consistent and up-to-date messaging by police spokespersons. They are to be used by designated police service members and senior managers when speaking to the public or the media.

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Policing Large Gatherings and Large Demonstrations (Truckers' Convoys/Anti-Vaccination Mandates)

February 4, 2022

Background

Overview of Policing Large Gatherings and Demonstrations

Police officers continue to deal with demonstrations of various kinds, from protests against anti-COVID-19 restrictions to political protests. Ontario's current Emergency Measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic place stress on officers in terms of safeguarding public health while also respecting the rights of Canadians to peacefully demonstrate. It is important that police organizations provide clear and consistent information in response to questions from media or the public about how their officers respond to demonstrations.

Police services should focus their messaging on public safety, keeping the peace, and applying enforcement measures consistently. Police services can expect to be asked about issues such as:

- Perceived differences in their approach to enforcement for different groups of demonstrators
- Perceived lack of enforcement if police are on-site at demonstrations but not visibly intervening (e.g., ticketing or arresting)
- Accusations of protestors willfully promoting hatred or displaying hate propaganda

Current Issue

On January 29, 2022, a *Freedom Convoy* involving those who identified as long-haul truck drivers arrived in Ottawa from across the country to protest vaccine-related border mandates imposed by the Federal government. This mandate requires truckers who cross the Canadian border into the United States to be vaccinated. The demonstrations have expanded from a cross-border vaccine mandate protest to calls to end all COVID-19 vaccine mandates and other public health restrictions, as well as various anti-government causes.

The demonstrators have gained traction on social media and have fundraised millions of dollars in support, both nationally and internationally. Companies like GoFundMe have frozen those funds.

A Toronto group has aligned itself with the *Freedom Convoy 2022* protesters and has planned a supposed *peaceful assembly* at Queen's Park for Saturday, February 5, 2022.

As the convoys continue and anger increases among the general population, police services throughout Ontario are under increasing pressure to respond and end the convoys.

Key Messages

General Response: Keeping our communities safe is everyone's responsibility

- The (Police Service) is aware of potential demonstrations. While we cannot discuss our service's operational plans, we want to emphasize that our priorities are to ensure public safety and to keep the peace.
- When large groups of people gather, the (Police Service's) priority is the safety of all involved, the general public, and property in surrounding areas.
- During these types of events, where emotions are running high for many, police personnel will use their experience and training to manage the crowds without further inflaming tensions to protect everyone's safety.
- Just because someone is not issued a charge at the time does not mean they cannot be laid at a later date. Officers will continue to investigate.

Specific Messaging

- The (Police Service) respects the rights of Canadians to exercise their freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.
- All members of the general public, road users, residents, and businesses also have the right to a safe environment.
- The (Police Service) recognizes the need to balance individual rights and freedoms with the need to maintain public peace and order. That's why we will focus on maintaining open communication with everyone involved in any public demonstrations and use a reasoned and tempered approach and the proper use of police discretion to guide our police personnel's responses.
- We will have a large police presence at these rallies to ensure the health and safety of the entire community, including those in attendance.
- We remain committed to working with our partners, including governments at the municipal, provincial and federal levels, to ensure these rallies do not threaten the safety of citizens.
- We encourage everyone to be patient and respectful.

Traffic Delays – Specific Messaging:

- Protest activities may interrupt the normal flow of traffic. The (Police Service) will endeavour to minimize the impact on the traveling public and to ensure order and public safety.
- Our police service's objective in policing any road closures/blockades is to restore the orderly flow of traffic in the safest manner possible. Information on specific delays will endeavour to keep the public informed via our police social media channels, city traffic channels and media outlets.
- Members of the public are encouraged to check for road closure information and monitor local media for information and alternate routes.
- The (Police Service) thanks everyone for their patience in dealing with traffic delays.

Enforcement/Threats/Violence/Illegal Activity:

- The (Police Service) urges everyone involved not to endanger members of the public or first responders (including police personnel), jeopardize public peace or participate in purposefully illegal events.
- The (Police Service) will maintain the peace and public/traffic safety and investigate criminal acts in accordance with its legislated responsibilities and in the best interests of all involved.
- Only the level of intervention necessary will be used to ensure the safety of the public and to maintain peace, order, and public security. The use of force is always a last resort.
- The proper use of police discretion is a valid, appropriate approach to de-escalating situations. The proper exercise of police discretion should not be confused with lack of

enforcement. Police personnel may wait for a lower-risk opportunity to arrest offenders rather than inflame a situation.

- The (Police Service) will respond to unlawful activities or actions in an appropriate and professional manner.
- We are reviewing security measures based on risk assessments and will be ready to respond and adapt to any potential dangerous situation.
- We will not condone any behavior or action that puts someone's health or safety in jeopardy, including any threats or acts of violence.

Questions and Answers:

Q: *"Why aren't officers breaking up the convoys and dispersing the crowds?"*

A: We understand the concerns of citizens and we share those concerns. We want to reassure the public that we continue to actively engage with and monitor these convoys. Those found committing crimes and acts of violence will be investigated and charges will be laid.

Q: *"We continue to see far-right messaging from those attending these convoys – including anti-Semitic and racist messages. What are you doing about that?"*

A: Our main focus is preventing these convoys from developing into situations that actively threaten the safety and security of our communities. We want to stress that we are monitoring these gatherings closely and those who are observed committing criminal offences are being investigated thoroughly. In any emergency, we ask the public to call 9-1-1 immediately.

Q: *"Why hasn't the military been called in, and why are we not seeing riot police at these gatherings?"*

A: We continue to work with our policing partners across the province, as well as all levels of government, to assess risk and develop strategic plans to address these convoys. Those conversations are ongoing, and we will continue to provide updates to the public and media as things progress.